Directed Writing Project:
From Anywhere to Somewhere

Jennifer Hlawacz

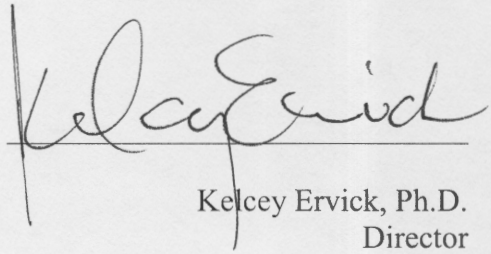
Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Indiana University

May 2015

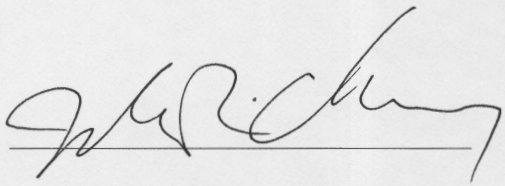
Table of Contents

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in English

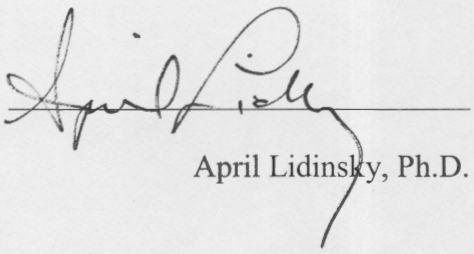
Committee



Kelcey Ervick, Ph.D.
Director



Joseph Chaney, Ph.D.



April Lidinsky, Ph.D.

From Anywhere To Somewhere: A Memoir

PROLOGUE

The clank of my boyfriend's keys on our apartment door wakes me. Metal scratches metal before Fisher's key slides into the deadbolt. The change in his pocket jangles when his Levis hit the floor. His scent consists of tobacco smoke and liquor; it comforts me before he approaches the bed. His scruff tickles my face with a quick, boozy kiss; his breath warms my nose. Little is said, and we sleep.

I don't know when I stopped thinking about my dad, but I do know that night is when I started again: Fisher's perfumed kiss unlocked memories that I must have hidden years before.

One of the first memories to surface was one of the last lovely memories I have of my father. During the time between the divorce and his death, no matter how drunk he was or what time he came home, he always checked on me, his smoky vodka lips waking me for just a moment with a goodnight kiss. It was his token of tucking me in since he was absent at bedtime.

My dad had a thick mustache when I was little, but I'm not sure if I know this from real memory or from memories of pictures I've seen. I am sure that he was exactly six-feet tall because we spoke about it several times, and that his sandy brown hair was parted on the side, which brought out his charming, light eyes. I want to say they were green like mine, yet at times, I think they were blue. I believe he always wore glasses, but that might have been only in the last years of his life. Their fat lenses encircled his droopy eyes and seemed to have originated from the same era as his outdated pants. I know that he worked as a furniture maker for a short period. We once had solid wood tables with creamy marble tops in our living room that my Papa created with his own, strong hands. I believe he was a security guard too, because I remember his wearing a policeman-like uniform and leaving after dark instead of during the day. I mostly knew him in the food service industry. I have positive memories of him as a manager at several different restaurants. He was so impressive and charismatic at work.

I have learned a basic outline of my father's upbringing, including his close relationship with my godmother, Connie. They had much in common. She and Papa were

around the same age and grew up next door to one other in the Polish neighborhood of South Bend, Indiana's west side. Both were born into Polish-Catholic families that had been displaced during WWII and shipped to the U.S. just after. Both attended St. Adalbert's Catholic School before going to Washington High School. Both left South Bend after graduation, Connie to college and my dad to the Army. Both returned to Indiana and ended up there, each one dying in a way far from what anyone could have envisioned.

PART 1: INDIANA—ARIZONA—INDIANA

Connie

Connie was my favorite grownup. Although I was born in South Bend, Indiana, we moved to Phoenix, Arizona, when I was a baby. Connie left South Bend to live with us when I was four. My admiration began immediately.

Connie was already up and moving when I got out of bed—she didn't sleep late like Mama and Papa were prone to do. She asked me if I'd like some eggs for breakfast and I, accustomed to cold cereal, was thrilled to have something fresh and warm which, in my family, was reserved for special occasions. Connie and I chatted as the eggs sizzled. Her calm demeanor and the waft of frying breakfast food relaxed me. I went on about Disney princesses, my favorite colors, about funny anecdotes in cartoons, and my wish for more Barbie clothes. Connie only listened and replied with encouragement, like a childless aunt or softened great-grandma. Mama had been done with little-kid babble after years of her children's silly prattle topped by a decade of her own husband's drunken gibberish. But Connie was patient and attentive, like a well-paid counselor, and within a few days she surprised me with miniature skirts, tops, and even tiny Barbie slippers, all masterfully crocheted out of colorful yarn. I wish I would have practiced after she taught me her skill. I wish I'd kept even a single fringe of Connie's granny square afghans.

"That's the last of the eggs. Would you like to go to the store with me?"

There was no rush. Connie sat across from me, smoked cigarettes and drank coffee as I gradually finished my breakfast.

I had little tolerance for a smoked-filled room or constant smoke poking my face, but I enjoyed the scent of freshly lit tobacco. I admired the thick stream that twirled off Connie's cigarette as it lay in the ashtray between puffs, the motion of the sharp, crisp white patterns highlighted by the sun's rays. It was similar to, but more reliable than, watching bubbles float away in a swirly breeze.

"Ready to go, Jenny?"

I slid into my flip-flops and we set out, strolling hand-in-hand on this bright desert day. My Arizona-bronzed hand let go of her soft, fair-skinned grip to sprint and push the crosswalk button. I darted right back, securing her hand to cross the street.

Connie passed me coins to drop into the bus's fare box and I chose two side seats for us rather than facing forward. Kneeling on the plastic chair, I shouted "Wow! Look Connie, a stretch limo! I bet there are famous people in there…Hey Connie, look at that puppy! Aww, he's so cute!"

"Yes, he is a cute one," she said, keeping it to that.

The initial excitement of the bus ride faded and I began to quietly observe the details of the world passing by me. Connie gazed through the glass as if she were looking at nothing at all. She seemed tranquil yet didn't scold me for being loud and fidgety.

"Connie, why don't you drive?"

"It scares me."

I didn't mind. I loved the bus. It had air conditioning and was not clouded by cigarette smoke. Plus, the view was excellent out of the big windows.

Connie was back in Indiana before I even started kindergarten. I don't recall saying goodbye, and I didn't see her again until I was seven.

Pizza Hut

Papa became a hero for me and my 2nd grade class. He arranged a field trip to his store so we each could craft our very own Personal Pan Pizza. Most of us walked to school, so the joy began by simply boarding the school bus. At Papa's Pizza Hut, we learned every detail about making pizza. They showed us the giant dough-mixing machine and the sharp, half-moon pizza cutter that seesawed any size pizza into eight triangle slices. We learned the proper way to fold a pizza box and watched a man hand-

toss a crust, flipping it high in the air and stretching it along his arms, just like on TV. Papa tipped tomato sauce onto the center of the dough, and then smoothed it around in a circle with the ladle's bottom. He was careful and precise, and his speech, clear.

"Don't put too much sauce. You guys have to make sure you leave enough room around the edges for the crust to rise."

As Papa quickly scattered the shredded mozzarella and flung the pepperoni rounds evenly across the top, we were in awe—star-struck, even. He placed the model pizza on the oven's conveyer belt which signaled that it was our turn. We assembled, single-file, each with a mini disc of raw dough in hand, more excited than even waiting to see Santa.

Without minimums or limits to our pizza decorating, some were sparse and others, smothered. Mine ended up with enough cheese and pepperoni to cover an extra-large. We proudly ate our tasty creations, and then toted our trophy leftovers in our individual boxes.

Our teacher gave us colored paper, glue, scissors, and crayons for each of us to construct a thank-you card for Papa. As I cut up a sheet of blue paper, I felt like the star of my classroom, and my Papa, the king.

After school, I saw him admire all of the colorful, misshapen little masterpieces while relaxing in bed as if he had discovered a bountiful treasure.

But he lost that job. He lost every job. Restaurant managers have the privacy to sip vodka throughout the day. They have fewer confrontations with superiors than other service industry positions. Yet his charming personality peaked with the onset of a buzz and quickly plummeted when his words slurred, attitude deteriorated, and eyes glazed with increasing inebriation.

Papa was warned, warned again, and eventually, they always had to let him go.

Spring, 1988

A few months later, I arrived after school to a house laden with cardboard boxes. Trash occupied most of the floor and all of the kitchen cupboards were open and half-empty. The fluorescent light fought to brighten the dark kitchen; the dense cloud of second-hand smoke indicated that both parents had been home most of the day. Mama's

cigarette was poised between her lips as she stood at the counter wrapping plates and protecting glasses with *The Phoenix Sun Times* and *The Penny Saver*. Papa was lifting the marble top out of an end table while his lit Pall Mall rested on the edge of another.

After many fights between Mama and Papa, after several more job losses, after heated conversations in Polish between Papa and his parents in Indiana, after the phone was disconnected, and after Papa's ridiculous promises to the landlord were broken, we were evicted.

The next day, time was up.

Papa had enough of our procrastination, "Goddammit, finish packing your room!"

I desperately whined back, "But there are no more boxes!"

Papa stuck his smoke in his mouth and flung a box of black garbage bags toward me. And since the electricity was already off, everything had to be squashed in the bags and squeezed in the station wagon before dark. Mama waded through the remains, tossing things up and flinging things around—she salvaged anything of value but quickly abandoned many items, too.

We piled in the car and were gone in seconds.

It was awkward getting up that early. The motel was so far from our old house that by the time we dropped Sascha off at Deer Valley High and drove to Constitution Elementary, forty-five minutes had disappeared, every morning.

Mama and Papa took the bed near the door with my three-year-old brother Daniel. My big sister Sabrina and I, who were eight and seven, slept in the other bed and Sascha at age sixteen, crashed on the floor between the two beds. The feet of the beds left a skinny walkway between a simple desk with a small chair and a dresser topped with a TV. The remaining space was crammed with layers of our clothing and a handful of other belongings. We discovered that most of our stuff was stuck in a storage unit somewhere.

It was boring. We couldn't play outside so I laid on my stomach to watch old reruns and game shows; I became jealous of the prize winners. I noticed that the framed artwork matched the floral pattern on the comforters of our new home—we never had much of anything that intentionally belonged together in our house.

At bedtime, Sabrina and I giggled at Papa's and Daniel's out-of-sync snores. Mama's frustration surfaced with a snap—she scolded us with a loud whisper and

smacked off the TV. For the first time of what would be many, I had to acclimate to the scary shadows and creaks of a new bedroom. I trained myself not to be fearful: that clank and grumble, just an old truck in the distance; the clink and swoosh, probably trash hitting the bottom of the bin. I watched the glow of Mama's cigarette. Each long drag lit up her face and darkened the wrinkles in her brow. Each time the gray ashes dimmed the orange tip, Mama knocked them into the tray and then enlivened the cherry with another puff. This rotation coaxed me to sleep like a playful mobile circulating over a baby's crib.

Mama and I went to the motel pool. It was huge compared to the above-ground one at our old house. As I sat and observed the water, I remembered climbing up Papa to jump off his shoulders and laughing with Sabrina when he tossed us in the air like a beach ball. I thought about the previous summer, the summer when Sascha taught us how to make a whirlpool.

"Is it ready yet, Sascha?"

"No, not yet. Keep running! Go faster!"

"Now…how about now, Sascha?"

The water carried us around the pool until it lost its propulsion—like floating in the current of a round river. And then we'd do it again. It was magical.

I finally left the company of Mama and meandered into the pool despite the collections of dead roaches in the corners which didn't seem to bother the other kids. It was worth it. I swam and splashed in the open space. I had freedom and mobility; I had room to move. I did not bother anyone and no one really bothered me. It was the closest I was getting to playing in a backyard.

Mama smoked and read *Women's World* magazine. She could try to relax. Since Sascha spent that summer in the pool with us, we were all strong swimmers.

Sascha said that Papa taught him to swim by repeatedly tossing him into a lake, "It scared the hell out of me. I almost drowned. But Papa kept saying, 'just flap your arms and legs' and I just kept sinking."

And as we got older, Sascha told us other stories about Papa.

"Remember when Papa took us to the lake outside of Phoenix, and two of my friends came along?"

I didn't remember. I don't really recall leaving town much apart from moving.

"Well he got drunk fast after we got there. He lied down on a raft and passed out in the lake. My friends and I were swimming and we noticed that his dick was hanging out! I was so embarrassed!"

Sascha also gradually informed us about how Papa used to always smack him in the face, ground him for weeks at a time; about how Papa had been stone stubborn and even though he was intelligent, he was sorely illogical.

Village Meadows Drive

After our motel stay, we moved into a home between our elementary school and the freeway. One day, the entire family piled into the station wagon for a grocery shopping excursion.

At the checkout, Mama handed each of us a one-dollar food stamp.

"You all can pick out a treat, up to twenty-five cents."

My eyes panned the colorful shelves and then began to focus on the yellow price tags. My favorites, candy like Snicker's bars and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, were marked fifty cents each, so sadly, the search continued. I smelled the minty sticks of Wrigley's gum at a quarter a pack; I handled the single rolls of Sweet Tarts and individual caramels marked five cents each—no interest there. So rather than traditional candy, I settled on something I spotted on the bottom shelf. It was the most practical choice for my budget: a Little Debbie Oatmeal Cream Pie, topping my twenty-five cent budget.

I marched up to pay, feeling like a grownup, then met everyone outside.

The plastic crinkled as I carefully opened the treat. The cream filling oozed out as I bit into the soft sandwich. It was so satisfying.

Papa pooled the change from our family's food stamp operation for cigarettes and gas.

"We're running on fumes, Ted," Mama said, raising her voice.

High strung, edgy, and anxious, Mama's overall patience weighed thinner each day. At this point, it was hard for me to remember what she had been like before, before my dad got really bad, when they didn't fight daily, when we ate dinner at the table every

night, when my Mama put on makeup in the morning and played with us and laughed a lot.

The wagon turned the corner, began puttering, and coasted to a stop.

"Get out of the car, Sascha. We're going to push it."

Papa was loaded in the light of the afternoon.

"No, Papa! What if someone sees me?"

"Get out of the car right now, dammit!"

My big, strong Papa began pushing from the driver's side and Sascha, from the passenger's. Mama clutched the steering wheel and gulped a cigarette. Her head turned and wavered while her eyes vigilantly triangled the three mirrors.

Mama finally turned into the gas station and the car lost its momentum. The incline of the entrance was enough to prevent the rear wheels from reaching the summit. Papa and Sascha tried to rock it over the hump, but every time they progressed a few inches, it rolled back down.

"Everyone out of the car, now!" Papa said, frustrated and perhaps, sweat sober.

Less weight actually helped.

They repositioned their footing and heaved at the count of three. Just as the wagon reached the cusp, their collective strength diminished. The rear tire rolled the length of Papa's left leg, and rested on his thigh.

He groaned, helpless, but kept his cigarette in his mouth and hands on the bumper.

Mama rushed over, "Oh my god! Oh my god, Ted!"

Suddenly, there were enough men there to help Sascha. They shoved the car until all four wheels touched the oily asphalt.

I was more ashamed than scared—an uncomfortable, new sensation.

Papa's leg was severely bruised, maybe even fractured. He never had it checked out and never would have admitted if it was broken, anyway. For weeks, his thigh and calf looked like a gloomy watercolor, a mosaic of deep purples, olive greens, and pale yellows.

The Backyard

Even though Mama hadn't spent any time decorating the Village Meadows house, one day she decided to plant flowers. She dug a big hole in the back yard. It stayed empty while spring turned to summer.

Sabrina and I put on our matching red and blue bikinis and filled the hole with water. We created a private pool, just enough space for nine and seven-year-old girls. The natural clay in the soil was perfect for forming burgers, cakes, and pizzas but also slowed the earth's absorption of that water. We played Restaurant and let our homemade mud goodies bake in the Arizona sun between dips.

Mama usually yelled at us for our shenanigans, like when we used her nail polish to paint rocks, but we didn't get in trouble when she found out about our homemade pool.

The flower project didn't seem like it was a real thing anyway.

Later on, Mama and Papa came outside to prepare dinner. Since the gas got shut off, every night became Grill Night. At first, it was mostly hot dogs or hamburgers or cold sandwiches with chips for dinner. When that got old, my parents took our kitchen pots out back. The grill was a built-in cement block with a huge grate, so they used like a gas cook top. We had chicken legs and mashed potatoes, spaghetti and meat sauce, veggies, and even soft-boiled eggs. Papa worked extra hard to keep things light—he joked around with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He doused the orange coals with lighter fluid to kick up the flames—it guaranteed a few oohs and ahhs from his audience when we weren't afraid that his drunkenness would cause a fire, and temporarily sliced the tension to pieces.

After dinner, Sabrina and I gathered our Barbies, their hair brushes, our Wee Wild Thing dolls, and washcloths. After tossing all of our toys into the tub, Sabrina turned on the faucet and it began to fill. We crouched and shivered until Mama came in with a big pot of boiled water from the grill. We scooted to the back of the tub as Mama poured in the scalding water. After a few more trips, the water was warm.

We stayed in there, splashing around, washing each other's and our dolls' hair until our toes shriveled like raisins.

No matter how hard Mama scrubbed, black smoke painted those old gray pots—the soot was a perpetual reminder of those chilly Phoenix nights for years to come.

German

My parents fought in German.

Papa grew up speaking both Polish and English and in high school, he learned Russian and French. It was probably because he was astute with language that he was stationed in Germany, rather than Vietnam, when he joined the army.

Mama was working as a waitress in a pub near the American military base, in south western Germany in 1972. Papa had already completed his military duty and had worked in business for a few years. When he entered the pub, Mama was smitten.

"I saw him as soon as he came in. He was so handsome. So charming. His German was so good I didn't even know he was American!"

Mama has always acted spontaneously. She knew instantly that she wanted to have Papa's babies. They went out on a first date and moved in together on the second. She got pregnant immediately and they were married at the Justice of the Peace when she was eight months along with Sascha.

Night after night, I heard a lot of arguing coming from the kitchen. It was certainly about money, about drinking, about unfilled promises, about the way he handled the kids. About how cooking outside really wasn't fun.

I knew Papa was plastered, even in German.

Car Thief

The front yard of the Village Meadows house was mostly gravel but had a small landscaped area, close to the sidewalk. I squatted down in search of the cool scorpions or any of the big spiders that often frolicked around the huge round cactus.

A woman snatched my attention. She was short, carrying a clip board, and had long, chocolate brown hair tied back into a pony tail with feathery bangs in front. She strutted up the driveway and got into the driver's seat of the station wagon. She backed out as if I was invisible, and was gone in seconds.

I considered shouting, *Hey! Just what do you think you're doing, lady? That's our car!*

My heart was beating in my ears.

I jetted into the house, letting the screen door slam behind me.

"Mama! Mama! Some lady just stole our car!"

I was ready to dial 9-1-1, or to chase after her, or to follow any instructions.

"No, Jenny. She didn't steal it. They're taking it away because your father didn't pay the bill."

Why didn't Papa pay the bill? It was like a blow to the gut. *He knows we need that car!*

Mama rarely said anything negative about Papa around us, even when he broke his promises. I was under the impression that Papa kept everything okay, but that day it became clear that Mama was stronger one—constantly hindered by the weight of Papa's damages; always stuck sorting through the remains of his destructive path.

She flicked the lighter, lit her cigarette, took a long drag, and with the tail end of the exhale announced, "Your Papa got fired again."

"Why?"

"Jenny, your father's an alcoholic."

The blunt, confessional explanation occurred between puffs and sighs and drags.

"He won't stop drinking…he won't stop drinking at work…It's a disease. I try to help him and he won't listen."

Moving, again

We got our station wagon back and Papa left for Indiana. He stayed with his parents for a month or so before returning.

"We're moving to Indiana."

"Why do we have to move? I don't want to move again!" All of us kids said, in one way or another.

Papa had gotten a promising job in Indiana while he was there. I bet he was able to reinvent his image while interviewing; maybe he created a new persona for himself. Perhaps he could flourish without any kids or wife to worry about and felt better being home, or the closest thing to it.

I had just finished 3rd grade and was seven-years-old. I tried to imagine what Indiana was going to be like, but the only scenes I could envision were the still lifes of Arizona landscapes I had seen in real life covered in the snow I had seen on TV.

Sascha planned on staying in the desert. He was almost eighteen and about to begin his senior year of high school. He worked out a deal with Papa to live with friends until graduation, but Papa scammed him and forced him go with us at the last minute, which I didn't find out about until much later.

I also found out that Papa's sudden move to Indiana was a trial separation for my parents and that my grandparents wouldn't give them any more money unless they agreed to move back.

"Jenny, I wanted to leave your father even before Daniel came along. I just never have any resources. His drinking got bad, and then it got worse. And when we moved back to Indiana, it was worse than ever before."

Packing was, of course, chaotic. Sabrina and I ended up shoving everything we had into cardboard boxes and garbage bags, without separating clothes from books or toys. Sascha, Mama, and Papa loaded the trailer to the brim, and the very back of the wagon was filled to the ceiling, too. Toward the end, Papa used bungee cords to haphazardly affix random extras like a beat up box fan and poufy plastic bags onto the hitch between the car and the U-Haul trailer.

We left another house with open cupboards, unvacuumed carpets; cigarette butts and ashes scattered to salvage the ashtrays. The floor, a dumpster. We went, but the fights, the ugly drunken nights, the history of the house remained in the diary of our memories.

On the first day of the trip, I saw a train and crossed a train track for the first time. There was nothing else exciting for days. The desert highway was painfully straight and until we got further east, the only sights were sporadic gas stations and dusty diners. We stayed at cheap hotels along the way and ate food that my parents purchased at nearby grocery stores.

On our fifth and final day in the car, we hit Illinois. It got dark, and then pitch-black. We were cruising down the toll road when gallons of rain began slamming into the car. The wipers were worthless and it seemed like we were driving down a river. The wind was a bully—our wagon and the U-Haul teetered chaotically. When the semi-trucks began to pull over, Papa finally succumbed and followed them on the shoulder. The hail

pinked the windshield as it pummeled the earth. And the lightening lit it up the raindrops like the flash of a strobe light.

The storm morphed into rain and we commenced our final stint. We arrived at my grandparent's house much later than they had anticipated, just before the sunrise. They told us they worried because the news said that two tornados had taken a similar route on the interstate.

PART 2: INDIANA—NEW YORK—INDIANA (1990-1993)

Cedar Street

We moved into a blue two-story home on Cedar Street, five blocks from our new elementary school. Papa's new job was as a manager of a Big Boy Restaurant. Connie worked near there at an Osco's drug store. It was down the street from their old neighborhood. Connie still lived there with her parents in her childhood home.

Papa worked a lot and Connie visited frequently. She was one of the only perks of being in Indiana. She often brought us gifts and sweet treats from the Polish bakery. She and Mama smoked cigarettes, drank coffee, and chatted together at least several times a week.

Connie and Mama first became good friends when Mama lived in Indiana in 1980 and 81. It was just after my parents moved from Germany and around the time I was born—this is why my middle name is Constance and why she became my godmother. During that time, Connie filled Mama in on some of Papa's family history. She explained that Papa's parents were incredibly strict when they were young. Even in the 60s, he wasn't allowed to wear jeans. He saved his newspaper delivery money to buy a pair and changed out of his slacks in the alley on his walk to school. When he was caught doing this, he was beaten. If he spoke anything except Polish in the house, he was beaten. If he got anything except straight A's on his report card, he was beaten. He was beaten by his parents and also by his grandmother. He was an only child and not allowed to appear imperfect.

Mama told me that Connie's life was tough too, but mostly into adulthood. Her parents seemed much more normal than Papa's, but they were also WWII Polish refugees who raised her with a strong Catholic mindset and Depression Era values.

"I can't exactly remember why she came to us in Arizona. I know that she had just lost her job as a housemother at Culver Academy. She wasn't well and the stress was too much."

Mama is easy to talk to, an excellent listener, direct, and honest. She has somber blue eyes accentuated by dark olive skin.

"What was wrong with her?"

"Jenny, Connie was a lot like your father, never would talk about anything. I wish I could have helped her more, but my English was still so bad back then."

I knew Mama's English wasn't perfect even when I was little in Arizona. My friends asked why she spoke differently and I remember her fumbling to find words in the middle of sentences, words like "circus" or "vote," which aren't used every day. Now her English is nearly flawless and I have to force my ears to hear her slanted vowels or W's turned V's.

"I do know that when she was at college, her parents hadn't heard from her for a while and she stopped going to classes, so they drove to check on her. Her apartment was filthy, filled with diet food, and her teeth were all rotted out."

"Was she at IU at the time?"

"No, Jenny, she was at Yale! She was very intelligent. She had a full scholarship."

"Jesus Mama, what the hell happened to her?"

I wondered how this kind, gentle woman, who ended up working as a sales clerk at a drug store, ever could have gone to Yale. I recalled how she treated me when she was with us in Arizona—so tender and fragile—the opposite of Mama. There was an innocence about her character which is probably why we bonded so easily. Mama often got stressed, but could handle any stressful situation with ardor. Connie, however, would probably fall apart.

"I don't know. Like I said Jenny, she never talked about any of it. I suspected that she had been raped or harmed in some way. She studied theology, ya know, at Yale, getting her master's. Maybe one of those priests tried to molest her!"

Maybe.

Papa was an altar boy his entire childhood. When the Catholic Church was in the news with the child sexual abuse cases, it had crossed my mind that maybe Papa was a victim and, with everything else, maybe that's why he was messed up.

Mama also told me that Connie adored my Papa.

"She might have even been in love with him."

School Shopping

We were in the Kmart parking lot after picking up my 4th grade school supplies. Adjusting to the moist August heat after being calmly cooled by the store's AC, I smelled the black tar of the asphalt as my flip flops stuck to the soft ground for an extra millisecond, making them flop a touch slower.

A middle-aged man approached us as we approached our car.

"Hey, did you hear about the shootings?"

"No. What happened?" My mother quickly asked, shocked at the stranger's necessity to abruptly divulge this information.

"It was early this morning, 'bout 6am. Osco's on Western Ave. A robbery and triple murder."

I imagine that Mama's eyesight was temporarily lost, her pupils displaying that her visual focus disappeared as she searched inward for Connie's work schedule.

The man walked toward the store entrance and we began to load the car.

After a few long seconds of silence Mama said, "That's Connie's Osco. But I'm sure that she wasn't there yet. She didn't have to go in until later in the morning."

We rolled down all the windows immediately and once we got moving, the smothering heat dissipated quickly. The wind whipped in and out of the windows, weakened Mama's cigarette smoke, and overtook all sounds. I watched my curly hair fly up in the air and thought about which new outfit I'd wear on the first day of school.

Shortly after we arrived home, the phone rang behind me while I stared at the TV.

Even though I was young, I could interpret Mama's side of the conversation. I noticed an arch in her usually deep voice and then turned around. I watched her face

redden. Her rarely-seen tears confirmed what she had silently dreaded since we left the store.

Connie's was my first funeral and I did not know how to act. It felt like normal church because everyone was dressed up and serious. I had recently used my eight-year-old intuition to avoid lectures from my grandparents at Saint Adalbert's mass, which is where my relationship with Connie began—it's where I was baptized, where she and Papa went to school, where everyone congregated before we caravanned to Saint Joseph funeral home.

The funeral home lighting was peachy and soft which made the flowers surrounding Connie look even lovelier. It was the first time I had seen and smelled so many bouquets.

As I warily walked closer to see my Godmother one more time, Osco's popped into my mind. But it wasn't until years later that I pondered how terrified Connie must have been, how the shooter terrorized them before pulling the trigger, whether she heard her colleagues' fatal shots fired before her own; how terribly unfair it was that she volunteered to begin work early that morning. If only she had stayed home.

I stood close to Connie's casket and thought I should pray for her, but I observed her instead. Her walnut hair was tied in a loose bun, just like she had always worn it. An excess of chalky makeup weighed down her funeral face even though Connie never applied any in real life, including an orangey concealer that the embalmer attempted to use to blanket the area where the bullet must have exited around her left eye. I curiously noticed the fake eyelid and artificial eyelashes—another try at reconstructing Connie's dainty face. Peering closer, I accidentally saw the crater in the back of Connie's head that neither her thin hair nor the embalmer were able to fully mask. I fixated on how one pale hand rested atop the other, the same hands that showed me how to tie my shoelaces and held my hands as we strolled around Phoenix together. The hands that passed me an ice cream cone before it melted all over my own hands. The talented tools used to create the afghans that decorated our old sofa. Connie's fingers, fingers that were surely interlocked with my Papa's fingers, decades before.

Kai

Papa never spoke about his first son. No one did.

"Who's Kai?" I interrupted as we pulled into the driveway of my grandparent's house.

The repeated deceleration and acceleration with the three right turns to their driveway awoke me from my daydream just in time to overhear my parent's discussion.

"Kai is your big brother, in Germany," Mama said.

"What? I didn't know about him!"

"Of course you did!"

We got out into the house and that was that. We never talked about Kai. No one did.

I thought about Kai periodically, like how you remember the cousin you only met once. But I didn't learn more about my other big brother until over a decade later. Papa had gotten married young, not long after he was first stationed in Germany. His wife quickly got pregnant and they were divorced soon after Kai's birth.

"But Mama, how could Papa leave Kai? How could he stand to leave his first-born son in Germany like that?"

"After your father and Kai's mom divorced, she became very bitter and wouldn't let him see Kai. Back then, fathers had less rights than they do now, Jenny. Even in Germany."

And back then, Papa's parents probably encouraged this abandonment by encouraging Papa to move back to the U.S. and to be closer to them again.

"When we first arrived in South Bend, it was hot; late August. Sascha was still in Germany, with your father, tying up loose ends. I decided to walk Sabrina outside—she was only about three months old. Connie's mom greeted me and said something like, 'I thought you had blond hair, like in the pictures,' and I knew enough English to understand what she was saying. That bitch never told anyone that Papa had gotten divorced and remarried."

Mama also said that the bitch, Papa's mother, did nothing to make her feel welcome there, like only clearing out one drawer for all of her and Sabrina's belongings.

The Apartment

Everything got worse after Connie's funeral.

Papa words slurred nearly every time he spoke. Tension rose in the house. And in the spring, Mama made Papa move out. We went to his house on the weekends and he was on his best behavior—still drinking, but would make efforts to cook us real meals and play board or card games with us. But after a few months of living without Papa's income, Mama couldn't afford to take care of us and the Cedar Street house on her own. So we left the blue house and all crammed into Papa's tiny two-room apartment. Our stuff, stored away again.

Mama and Papa slept in the living space on a floor futon. In the center of the bedroom, Sascha's and Daniel's dressers were stacked on Sabrina's and mine, creating a divide. An open drawer would touch the bottom of our bunk beds and besides the entrance, not even a book would fit between my brother's beds and their surroundings.

The physical structure of the two-story house we'd been in clouded my perception of my parents fighting. But in this apartment, there was no diffusion. Their arguments woke me up multiple times. On one particularly ugly night, we were all ordered to wake up.

"Everyone get up! I'm leaving your father. Come on, let's go! Get your stuff!"

Papa had a nasty rebuttal, but I do not remember the details.

I stuffed a few of the toys that weren't in storage into my backpack and wondered if I would be able to skip school the next day. Mama lit cigarette after cigarette going from hotel to hotel to find the cheapest rate.

We were stowaways at the Mishawaka Inn for the remainder of that night plus one more, and we did miss school. Mama worked furiously to make arrangements and to gather our belongings from the apartment. Sascha kept us occupied in the room.

We didn't see Papa before we left and we didn't say goodbye to our friends. We didn't tell our teachers we were leaving or bid farewell to our classmates. We woke up, got into the car, and left town. A few miles into our trip I asked, "Where are we going, Mama?"

"Remember Katie and Walt, our friends from Phoenix who moved away? We're going to their house, their house in New York."

New York

Katie and Walt also had four kids, but they were younger than us. They lived in a spacious, old farmhouse in the Finger Lakes region. As we drove in, the car went up and around the gorgeous, green hills while we crossed rivers and streams. We passed shiny slabs of black shale rock, stacked and jagged, that had pushed their way up out of the earth. Daunting tractors sowed open fields and long sprinklers wet them down. I grimaced at the powerful whiff of fertilizer but was delighted by the sight of wandering farm animals.

Life became structured. We had a wakeup time and breakfast time, a homework time, a play time, a bath time, a dinner time, and a bedtime. Mama got a job and seemed happy. We loved to run around the massive yard and I loved to learn about country living, including how families deal with their garbage—like separating recyclables, how to compost organic waste, and how people burned the rest—without public trash services.

But by at the end of the school year, I began to encounter snippets of stomach-aching signs; the most obvious was the murmur of serious, quiet conversations between Mama and Katie, like bosses slyly speaking to one another a week before layoffs.

"Hey kids, guess what? You're going to go stay with Marcia for a while. Remember her house in the woods? You'll have so much fun there!"

We crashed on the floor and hung out with Marcia's boys, who were nine and fourteen—a bit older than me and Sabrina, at the time. Mama stayed with Katie but came to Marcia's every night. We were often corralled into a separate room so adult conversations could take place.

After a few weeks of that, and before the boys' mentalities did much damage to our vulnerable minds, it was over.

"Kids, get your stuff together. Your father's coming to get you."

Indiana, again

Papa's parents hired a private investigator to find us. So after just several months in fresh New York State, we were back in the stale, smoky apartment again.

A blond lady came over, but not inside. She was carrying a manila folder filled with papers. Sabrina and I stammered outside, and Papa stayed in with Daniel, who was too young, while she asked us a few questions about Mama and Papa.

There was no appropriate level of honesty to present since I had never really heard anyone talk about Papa's problems openly. But she did not ask the right questions, questions about his behavior, like why he was not home at night. She didn't ask about four of us living in a one-bedroom apartment or about a typical meal. She failed to ask what our bedtime was, or how our grades were in school—those questions would have been easy to answer.

"Who do you want to live with?"

The sun became a guilt-inducing spotlight in an outdoor questioning room. *How could I possibly choose?*

I watched my foot comb dirt on the ground, tried to grab a read of Sabrina's face, focused on a leaf in a nearby tree, bit my lips, and picked my fingernails, "I don't know."

The guilt continued. I should have said I wanted Papa—he was weak and needed us. I should have said Mama—she had been through so much and would take good care of us.

It probably did not matter, anyway. Custody went to Papa because Mama took us out of state without Papa's permission—"kidnapping," according to the Indiana court system.

Mama stayed in New York and Sascha stayed with her—Indiana never did anything good for either of them. Sabrina, Daniel, and I were left on our own, a litter of displaced kittens.

Duplex

Papa seemed to have more money. It was probably because he kept his job for a while at Starlite Pizza, got money and a car from his parents, and had income from Mama's child support payments, plus plenty of food stamps.

Papa found a duplex on Cedar Street, just a few blocks south of our first Cedar Street house. He charmed the landlord into lowering the rent. In exchange, he promised to fix whatever went wrong in the house and not to trouble the landlord with it which

never worked out, like when the toilet constantly overflowed in the carpeted bathroom. And since Papa was never home, we just threw towels down to cover it up.

This house seemed huge and was closer to school than the apartment. Papa had promised to get us into a bigger place for months. He felt better when he made us happy, when he managed to keep a promise.

A few months after my 10th birthday, it was time for the class field trip to go see a live performance of *The Nutcracker*. I begged Papa to be a chaperone for the event. He agreed. During the play, he sat a few rows behind me. I heard students chuckling. Papa was passed out, head back, mouth open; audible snores snuck out during quiet moments of the orchestra's sets. I sunk in my seat.

August, 1992

Within a year of leaving, Mama and Sascha came back to Indiana. They lived in the apartment that was below her and Papa's first apartment in the U.S., in the Polish neighborhood, across from where Papa and Connie grew up. Connie's parents still lived in the same house.

On the first day of 6th grade I was alone for the first time because Sabrina started 7th grade, which was junior high. Even though I was at same elementary school, I was isolated in my class's line.

My loneliness was cured by my future friend.

"Hi, I just moved here from Hammond with my mom."

"I live with my dad."

We had similar stories and both carried the weight of being disjointed. By the end of the day, we were best friends.

"Leslie, what's your phone number?"

"We don't have a phone."

"You don't? Neither do we! But I was going to call you from the pay phone."

I was relieved. I didn't have to again face the embarrassment of divulging that we couldn't afford a phone.

"I was going to call you from a pay phone too!" She said, probably also thankful that I couldn't pass judgment on her.

"Oh well; see you tomorrow."

A few weeks later, Papa took Sabrina, Daniel, and me to buy bikes at Kmart saying they would be early Christmas presents. We hadn't had bikes since Arizona so we were all excited. I picked out a purple and pink mountain bike with matching tassels on the handlebars, and clean, white tires.

We rode our bikes everywhere. But one Saturday morning, they were no longer chained around the old laundry pole in the backyard.

"Papa, someone stole our bikes!"

I don't recall his response. When we told Mama, she simply said, "he probably pawned them."

Papa also said that the pet rabbits he got us were stolen. That our VCR broke, that microwaves were useless. That he was saving money so we could buy cars when we were old enough to drive. That he was just going to borrow our piggy bank money until he got paid. I believed him about some of that, but was never convinced about the piggy banks.

7th Grade

Papa picked me up from John Young Middle School to buy new shoes. He tried to be sneaky, but his drunken clumsiness allowed me to catch him nibbling on a white tablet.

"What's that, Papa?"

He said that the doctor told him to eat sugar pills. I didn't remember him ever going to the doctor, or saying that he didn't feel well, but I had noticed Papa using salt substitute, which was bizarre, because Papa liked to salt everything, even apples.

When I told Mama, she said, "His liver is probably dying."

Papa dropped me off at the door. I guessed he needed time to finish his smoke before entering a store. I roamed around to find shoes cool enough to reinvent my image. I found the perfect pair of black Asics with cobalt blue trim.

"Papa, can I have these?"

"They're sixty dollars. No way, they're not worth it."

He grabbed some comparable generics, not nearly as cool as the Asics, "get these. They're ten bucks and just as good."

"Those are ugly! I don't want them, I have to have these!" I had my right foot in one and was hugging the other.

We continued the argument and Papa said we couldn't afford them, and promised to get them another time, or when he got a raise, or next month—anything to appease me. He really didn't make any sense. I was relentless.

"Yeah, right, you always say that! I never get anything I want…you always buy cigarettes…why don't you stop buying them and maybe we'll have money!"

"You're not getting anything then! Let's go!"

I was furious and upset. He was drunk and emotional. In this state of mind, Papa sometimes let his guard down.

"How would you feel if I left and never came back?"

Papa wouldn't leave us. He never did, at least not for long.

"I'd be sad, of course."

October 22, 1993

Leslie and I leisurely strolled home. It was the Friday after my 12th birthday and one of the last sunny days of that October. Leslie went into her house and I finished the commute alone, like I always had done. Daniel went to a friend's house, and Sabrina and I were hanging out, listening to the radio when my grandfather called.

"We come to your home," he said, his Polish accent thicker on the phone than in real life.

"No, you shouldn't come over," I pleaded, "Papa isn't even home from work yet."

Our house was always a disaster and we knew we would get scolded by them. Friends had commented on our messy house before, so we were already embarrassed without the added grandparent shaming.

"We come now."

Sabrina and I hurried to do a quick pickup of the house.

We weren't natural around our grandparents. We were subliminally shown that our behavior around them was to be in line with their idea of proper, and much the opposite of how we all acted at home.

My stomach ached with anxiety. I wished Papa was there to protect us.

A knock at the door. *They're here.*

They never came to our house and we never went to their house without Papa. I kept thinking, *Maybe he'll come home soon...I hope Papa comes home soon!*

We cheerfully answered the door and greeted them with hugs and kisses, like we knew we were supposed to do. They began their visit with some basic, subtle chitchat followed with humiliating us about pasta sauce stuck on the stove and sporadic garbage on the floor.

My grandma's announcement came abruptly.

"Your Papa, he die."

I did not know how to react. There was no protocol for this; there was no acceptable emotion to display. I could not disrupt the grandparent façade we always used and I could not interrupt the obvious pain Papa's parents felt.

So I called Leslie and told her right away. Her mother dropped her off and returned a few minutes later with Daniel, who was bawling when he arrived.

We gathered some clothes to stay at their house. After what felt like hours into the 30 minute silent car ride, it occurred to me to ask, "How did he die?"

"A man shoot your Papa. At work," my grandmother answered.

Papa's was an open-casket funeral, like Connie's. But I don't remember it as vividly. It was held at the same Catholic church, funeral home, and cemetery as Connie's. I remember noticing the same orangey makeup that smothered Connie's delicate face now appeared on Papa's, and that kids from my school who didn't like me came out of curiosity, not sympathy.

"You must pray for your Papa," his anguished parents urged.

A few days later, my siblings and I were sitting in the living room of Mama and Sascha's apartment.

Perhaps having finally let it sink in, I broke our silence with a question that I thought would receive speculative answers, "Why would anyone want to kill Papa?"

Sascha, 19-years-old, blunt and honest, answered fast: "He wasn't shot. He shot himself."

Sascha had driven to Elkhart, the next town over, to get the police report on Papa's case. In the "Cause of Death" box, it clearly said: *Gunshot wound to the head,*

self-inflicted. Inquiring further, Sascha found out that witnesses reported that our Papa had been in a heated argument with a woman in a parking lot in Elkhart and shot himself right there. His blood alcohol level was greater than 2.0 at around 1pm. He died in the hospital shortly after.

I understand why my grandparents didn't tell us the truth and I wonder if they actually didn't believe that their son had taken his own life.

"You must pray for your Papa," they'd always say.

And I always thought, *He's in Hell, there's no reason to pray for him. Suicide is unforgivable.*

They were so disillusioned that when being interviewed for the obituary, they reported that Papa worked with computers when he actually had mostly floated between factory and restaurant jobs and to my knowledge, he had never worked with computers.

Maybe God forgave him while he was in the hospital.

Maybe I'll pray for Connie.

EPILOGUE

I was 20 when Fisher and I moved in together and 21 when we split up. I was a full time student and waitress then; he was an infrequent, part-time cook. Our drunken fights felt familiar. Our arguments over money and responsibilities, comfortable discomforts.

But it was not until that one particular night—when his keys, change, and scent woke me up— that I became bombarded with sudden bursts of memories. A drive down Cedar Street was fine before but after, it attacked—it spurred anxiety, the same anxiety I felt when Papa drove us, when the wheels crossed over those same yellow lines. An unfiltered cigarette would consume my thoughts and halt my stride—Papa was the only one who smoked them. I saw a dad fish with his kids at the park and I remembered the anxiety I felt when Papa told the park ranger his fishing license is in the mail when I knew it was a lie and knew he wasn't supposed to be drunk and worried he'd get in trouble. I questioned my own actions as a child. I obsessed over "what-ifs." I remembered the day he died, which I hadn't thought about in years. I interrogated my

mother about my father. I asked men of a similar age if they knew Papa. I avoided answering questions about him or his death; I was evasive when I did.

"Where are you from?" *I don't know. I moved around a lot growing up.*

About a year after Papa died, we moved back to the same area in New York. A few years later, back to the same area in Indiana.

"What are you, a military brat?" *Something like that.*

Fisher and I broke up not long after. Our breakup was followed by a wild time through the rest of my 20s—I committed mostly to myself, but sometimes, I accidentally committed to men. At 24, I fell for Arthur, but he didn't fall for me. At 26, a boy and I fell for one another but I left him for a job without a breakup and when I returned, he left me and I didn't miss him anymore. There was another bad fall at 28—perhaps a story for another time.

But at 29, Jake and I fell in love.

Jake is a smoker but doesn't smoke near us. He used to drink but then he stopped. When I was clear-headed and pregnant, I accidentally made him quit by speaking of Papa and Papa's issues, and my issues and worrying when Jake was out or missed my call.

At 31, I had Jake's baby. We named her Lola.

Now I have a permanent man and we have a permanent daughter. Lola will always know where she's from.

I still hate cigarettes, but I love Jake's smoky kisses.

On Crafting *From Anywhere To Somewhere: A Memoir*

The possibility of expanding a personal essay assignment into my thesis project arose in a creative nonfiction course during one of my final semesters of classes for my M.A. in English. The original draft of the twenty-page childhood memoir was loaded with conversational exposition, had a distant and inconsistent voice, and chaotic sections. It contained interesting and emotional subject matter, but did not have a cohesive narrative style or sufficient scenes which created a confusing story. My focus for revision included transforming some expository sections into vivid scenes and continued with establishing a distinct, more personal voice and character for the "I" in the memoir which, in turn, also helped to solidify the memoir's intention. With my edits, I more fully develop the realization of how my parental relationships and childhood affect the decisions I make throughout my life. Since we moved many times growing up, I also needed to restructure and retitle the sections to clarify the locations and timeline. For help, I utilized *Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, edited by Dinty Moore, and Bill Roorbach's *Writing Life Stories* because both provide nonfiction craft and memoir tools as guidelines for my own creative project. However, I also turned to several book-length memoirs for ideas. In Jeanette Walls's *The Glass Castle* and Sonja Livingston's *Ghostbread*, the lead characters are women who grew up with similar family conditions as my own. Both women narrate the intimate story of their childhood with details of memories exhibited through scene and exposition. After many revisions, my memoir now has a clearer point of view in carefully chosen sections with a linear sequence and consistent language.

While the original version of my memoir was interesting and poignant, it contained too many talky, diary-like stories. I transformed many of them into descriptive, sensory-driven scenes. Roorbach's "Show, don't tell" motto was beneficial; he says, "A good scene can succinctly exemplify and illuminate whole sections of life…mak[ing] further discussion unnecessary" (46). In other words, since memoirs are so personal, scenes allow the reader to visualize situations and make their own conclusions about it without the author dictating every detail. Roorbach adds, "Instead of a passage about your family's socioeconomic status, you show your dad pulling up in the brown Ford

wagon, muffler dragging" (45). This way, the reader can decide how to feel about the car, the dad, and why it is important to the narrative.

There are many instances in *Ghostbread* that exhibit successful scene use in lei of merely telling the story. Livingston often begins with a bit of exposition but then jumps right into vivid scenes to drive the narrative. In one section, the young narrator is speaking of her new friend Michelle who teaches her how to dress provocatively and apply makeup. The section is set up by telling a detail about their general relationship. Livingston writes, "I knew she was wrong but I hung onto everything Michelle said just the same" (178). While short, this exposition tells the audience that the girls are in the position that we all have faced during our adolescence—everyone buys into peer pressure in some form or another—which draws the audience into a specific, relatable moment. Toward the end of the section, she incorporates a visual scene. She says, "…my mother did not wait for me to sit down. She dug her fingers into my upper arm and pulled me into the basement where she took a wad of scratchy brown paper towels to my face" (178). This elucidation, including the use of "dug" and "scratchy brown" to sensitize the reader, is much more interesting than simply stating that her mother was upset with her after she befriended and began dressing like Michelle. Livingston's strategic crafting is an example of what creates a rich, interesting memoir.

I found room to improve my scenes with a similar exposition-mixed-with-scene technique. For instance, instead of stating that my dad was sober when my class visited his Pizza Hut, I place him into the scene to show it. After I briefly, yet vividly, recount the beginning of the pizza lesson, I slow down to more fully describe my father demonstrating how to top a pizza. I write, "Papa tipped tomato sauce onto the center of the dough, and then smoothed it around in a circle with the ladle's bottom. He was careful and precise, and his speech, clear" (4). While the audience is able to visualize the beginning of the pizza day despite the section's expository nature, the incorporation of a vivid Papa scene at the end of the paragraph gives it meaning; it begins to show that I recognize my father's love, and his attempts to display it, even though his alcoholism sometimes made it difficult for it to surface. Roorbach says that this exposition-scene strategy is important because, "…it's the type of exposition that doesn't interrupt the reader's picturing the scene, but instead heightens it" (48). In other words, exposition can

be a helpful tool—the tidbits needed to understand the intense sections—for understanding the inner story of the narrative. And because there is too much story to tell about one's life in anything besides an infinite text, memoirists must carefully craft their exposition, summary, and scene-making to work collaboratively and to reinforce the narrative's theme. Further, I chose to focus on my father in the scene rather than anyone else working at Pizza hut that day. Similarly, Livingston, whose memoir is much about the relationship between her and her mother, purposefully chose to briefly describe Michelle's influence on her but takes more time to elucidate her mother's reactions to her newfound friendship and behavior. Therefore, I focused on exemplifying the scenes that pertain to my relationships with my mother and father, and through revision, have either deleted or summarized the less pertinent ones.

After decreasing the exposition and summary and increasing the scenes in my memoir, it still lacked a depth to draw the reader into the narrative. I created a deeper complexity by balancing my innocent, childlike chatter with a more mature, reflective voice, and by increasing the use of metaphor. In "Writing Through Innocence and Experience: Voices in Flash Nonfiction," Sue William Silverman writes that The Voice of Experience "offers the progression of thought…by examining what the Voice of Innocence (facts and raw emotions) means. This more complex viewpoint interprets and reflects upon the surface subject" (71). In other words, the vivid scenes I created originally felt distant because they lacked sufficient interpretive perspective—difficult to accomplish with a childhood memoir. For a more experiential depth to my narrative, I looked to Walls's technique in *The Glass Castle,* which coincides with Silverman's suggestion of incorporating metaphor into scenes: Silverman's advice is to always describe a specific memory "in such a way that it metaphorically conveys how you felt about it, reflecting back, incorporating knowledge and language you lacked in the past" (73). In other words, the inclusion of metaphorical statements naturally shows that the scene has impacted the author, and therefore, is important enough to convey with a reflective, voice of experience sentiment. For example, in a scene from the "Connie" section, I describe my very young self babbling to Connie while, "Connie only listened and replied with encouragement, like a childless aunt or softened great-grandma." (2). The addition of "like a childless aunt or softened great-grandma" helps my voice of

experience: Connie was one of the most important people in Papa's life so I needed to connect her issues to my father's since, inevitably, her death impacted him and my family greatly. This use of metaphor validates that this scene stems from a mature, thoughtful, and experienced perspective rather than from the four-year-old who is present in the scene.

Two main characterizations in Walls's memoir *The Glass Castle*, her mother and father, also rely on one another to validate important scenes. For example, Walls successfully adds the interpretive voice of experience with a scene depicting a dramatic fight between her parents. She writes, "It was a moonless night, so we couldn't see Mom except when she ran into the beam of the headlights. She kept looking over her shoulder, her eyes wide like a hunted animal's" (43). The imagery created in the scene lets the audience know that Dad is chasing Mom with the car; however, the inclusion of the hunted animal simile is, in itself, haunting: it reveals Jeanette's fear not only as a child, but as an adult who has pondered the severity of the situation over time. Therefore, short, metaphoric additions to scenes naturally add the voice of experience to narratives that are already innocent in nature and effectively draw the audience into the moment.

While stylistic choices helped to mend my memoir, the implementation of a cohesive voice, coupled with an appropriate tone, further improved my piece. Since, as Roorbach claims, "voice isn't a matter of conscious artifice so much as it is a matter of personality, of *affect*," I failed to fully recognize that voice is also "the clarity of a writer's caring about her subject deeply, and deeply caring about communicating it to her reader" (125). This is to say that voice must develop somewhat naturally in memoir, but it also has to be skillfully crafted in order to cater to an audience; there has to be enough personality to make the story believable but also enough craft to make it interesting and accessible. For instance, even though I always see the positive sides of bad situations—likely a result of my parent's avoiding any discussion on their culpability for various predicaments while also trying to keep us happy—I should not include these optimistic parts unless they are purposeful and match the memoir's tone and voice. So I deleted portions of scenes, like when I am excited to stay in hotels because we never stayed in hotels, and omitted several entire sections that seemed to unnaturally deter the narrative. For example, there was a scene in which Papa is driving in reverse and the wrong way up

a freeway ramp to avoid going around the block. I liked it, but it came off as funny and adventurous instead of depicting the scary and dangerous decision a drunk driver made while carrying young passengers, like I originally intended. I concluded that although certain passages can function in one place, like a humorous scene to lighten the intensity of a book-length memoir, they are not suited for everywhere, including my short narrative.

To further ensure that each section works collaboratively, I established distinct traits for the characters in my memoir. I took Roorbach's advice on characterization; he says, "Human beings are complicated; characters are simple. Human[s] have…ten thousand traits…Characters have maybe thirty, with one or two predominant. You get to pick" (99). Therefore while I revised, I opted to omit portions that heightened too many conflicting traits within individual characters. My mother, for example, was not always the high-strung individual I portray in my memoir. But to include many of my mother's different moods would have skewed the story. Furthermore, perhaps the most important rule about characterization in memoir is, "You can't—impossible—put your whole self on the page. Always, you pick and choose, construct an *I* that has a select and manageable few of your traits and quirks and inconsistencies" (95). So, while I was able to form distinguishing characteristics for family members, I had trouble creating a specialized "I" for my own character: in addition to the childlike voice, I tried to be funny, lighthearted at times—how I might describe myself today—and incorporated trivial sections that completely clashed with the serious tone of the overall story. Once I kept to the subject and illustrated my character traits as those which most pertain to the somewhat dismal subject, my memoir became much more focused and unified.

Although it took me much more time to finish my thesis work than I had anticipated, this time allowed me to grow with my project. Without taking breaks, I believe I would not have been able to reach the level of refinement I achieved. To walk away and return forces an individual to take a fresh look at a project, like when you come home from a vacation and notice the chipped paint on the porch that has been falling for years. Each time I returned to my writing, I found strength in my voice, in the characterization, and improved the structure of *From Anywhere to Somewhere*. Long

breaks allowed me to become a member of my own audience—an integral step in writing—and gave me the chance to participate in my narrative with new perspectives.

Works Cited

Livingston, Sonja. *Ghostbread.* Athens: U of Georgia, 2009. Print.

Moore, Dinty W. *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction: Advice and Essential Exercises from Respected Writers, Editors, and Teachers*. Brookline, MA: Rose Metal, 2012. Print.

Roorbach, Bill, and Kristen Keckler. *Writing Life Stories: How to Make Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest, 2008. Print.

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*. New York: Scribner, 2006. Print.